
Volume 2. Air Operator Certification and Fractional Ownership Application

CHAPTER 1. GENERAL

SECTION 6. INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO) COMPANY DESIGNATORS AND RADIOTELEPHONY DESIGNATORS (CALL SIGNS)

103. GENERAL. This section contains information, direction, and guidance to be used by operations inspectors when obtaining ICAO company designators and radiotelephony designators (call signs) for those operators who request or are required to obtain designators. Designators are used by commercial, domestic and international operators for air traffic control (ATC) operations. Designators are also used in the Aeronautical Fixed Telecommunications Network (AFTN) system for identification, communication, and billing purposes. The AFTN system is an integrated, international system of aeronautical fixed circuits. The AFTN system provides the exchange of messages and flight plans between aeronautical and fixed stations within the network. The designators are assigned when the FAA determines that designators are advantageous and operationally appropriate to the U.S. ATC system. A company designator and a radiotelephony designator are assigned as a unit. The four types of designators are entitled and described as follows:

- The company designator (ICAO three letter designator)
- The radiotelephony designator (call sign)
- The special radiotelephony designator (special handling)
- The local radiotelephony designator (local VFR operations only)

A. The Company Designator (ICAO three letter designator). The ICAO company designator is a three letter designator. The flight number serves as the aircraft identification in the ATC system. The designator serves as the aircraft identification for the ATC system in several situations. The authorized three letter designator and flight/trip number are used instead of the aircraft registration number and may be used for the international telecommunications service when its use is advantageous for ATC and operational purposes. The company designator may be used to expedite the exchange of written and computerized air carrier information in both the domestic and international ATC system to access the stored flight plan program and provide ATC with a quick and accurate means of visual recognition. A three letter company designator may be

assigned to aircraft operating agencies that operate 7 or more nonseasonal, scheduled international air operations each week or at least 15 nonseasonal, scheduled domestic round trip air operations each week, and generate appropriate flight plans and other related flight operations over the AFTN. The assignment of a company designator may be waived on an individual basis for aircraft operators that generate less than the prescribed international and/or domestic flight operations.

B. The Radiotelephony Designator (Call Sign). The radiotelephony designator call sign is usually assigned at the same time as the ICAO three letter designator, and the call sign becomes the aircraft identification for air and ground communications with air traffic personnel. Usually, the company name or a pronounceable abbreviation of the company name is used in combination with ATC facilities and operating services. An example is “American 411.” This designator replaces the standard “type/tail number” combination such as Cessna 398J. The radiotelephony designator should be phonetically pronounceable in at least the English, French, or Spanish language. The name of the aircraft company, operating authority, or servicing organization should resemble the radiotelephony designator, and the designator should not consist of more than two words and three syllables. An advantage of using radiotelephony designators is the reduction of on line noise distractions that create similar sounding radiotelephony designator confusion, expedite air and ground communication, provide easy auditory recognition, and reduce the potential for mistakes in verbal communication. A new or changed radiotelephony designator must be included in the remarks section of the operator’s flight plans for at least 60 days following the new designator’s effective date.

C. The Special Radiotelephony Designator. A special radiotelephony designator may be temporarily authorized by the Air Traffic Publication Branch, ATP-210, in coordination with ICAO, only when its assignment will identify special handling by ATC. ATP-210 may authorize the special designator for a commemorative flight, for a large number of aircraft participating in an organized race, for

aircraft operating during an emergency or disaster, or for aircraft that need special handling for test purposes.

D. The Local Radiotelephony Designator. A local radiotelephony designator shall be used only for communication with local airport traffic control towers during VFR operations; they shall not be used for filing flightplans.

105. APPLICABILITY. 14 CFR does not require that designators be obtained; however, designators may be required by the operator's operations specifications (OpSpecs). The FAA may choose to assign a three letter ICAO company and radiotelephony designator for operations based on the number of scheduled flights. The final approval of the company designators and radiotelephony designator is made by ICAO, who takes into consideration all designators approved throughout the world. The designator assignment is then administered by ATP-210. The final approval of the special radiotelephony designator and local radiotelephony designator is made by ATP-210 after checking the requested area of operations for conflict.

107. PROCEDURES FOR ASSIGNMENT OF DESIGNATORS. All requests for designators are directly made by the company to the POI. The POI sends the request to the regional air traffic division. Final designator assignment is administered by Washington Headquarters, Airspace Rules and Aeronautical Information Division, Air Traffic Publication Branch, ATP-210. ATP-210 notifies the Federal Communications Commission that an assignment has been made.

A. The Company Designator and the Radiotelephony Designator. POIs must have the following information to determine eligibility for both the ICAO three letter company designator and the radiotelephony designator:

- The name and address of the operator
- The type of aircraft operation or service provided (a list of the operators served is required for service operations)
- The intended use of aeronautical fixed telecommunications network systems (AFTN) for international services or operations
- The number and type of AFTN messages handled daily
- A copy of the company or operator published flight schedule
- A copy of the FAA certificate which authorizes the company's operations and states the Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part under which operations are to be conducted
- Provision of at least five suggested three letter designators and radiotelephony designators, listed in their desired order

B. Special Radiotelephony Designator. The following information must be submitted for the special radiotelephony designator request:

- Type of flight
- Type of handling required
- Type and number of aircraft
- Routes and duration of operation

C. Local Radiotelephony Designator. A letter of agreement that provides justification for obtaining the designator must be made between the local tower and the requesting company. The letter of agreement is reviewed by the regional air traffic division, which adds its recommendations to the letter and forwards the agreement and accompanying recommendations to ATP-210. ATP-210 checks the area of operations for conflict and approves if there is no conflict of designators.

109. EFFECTIVE DATE AND PUBLICATION. The required administrative period for approval of a three letter company and radiotelephony designator is approximately 45 calendar days. ATP-210 establishes an effective date for the designator and enters it into the stored flight plan program. ATP-210 advises the FAA facilities affected that the numbers will be published in FAA and ICAO documents (ICAO Document 8585, "Designators for Aircraft Operating Agencies, Aeronautical Authorities, and Services" and ATC Order 7340.1, "Contractions" manual). Failure to submit the proper documentation may delay a designator assignment.

111. CHANGES IN COMPANY STATUS AND CANCELLATION. When an assigned three letter company designator and/or radiotelephony designator is no longer required, ATP-210 must be notified by the company, in writing. Any designator that is released shall not be re-assigned within 45 calendar days. Notification of change or release may be made for the following reasons:

- Operations permanently suspended or canceled
- Change in the name, address, or physical location of the company
- Mergers and acquisitions that change or combine any company name holding more than one designator

113. OTHER INFORMATION SOURCES. Additional information on designators may be found in Order 7340.1, Contractions; Order 7210.3, Facility Operation and Administration; Federal Communications Commission Regulation 87.107 (Title 47 of the Code of Federal Regulations); and ICAO Document 8585, Designator for Aircraft Operating Agencies, Aeronautical Authorities, and Services.

114. – 124. RESERVED.